DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 681 CS 506 796

AUTHOR Lacy, Stephen
TITLE The Westley-MacLean Model Revisited: An Extension of a Conceptual Model for Communication Research.
PUB DATE Aug 89
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (72nd, Washington, DC, August 10-13, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audiences; Economic Development; Environmental Influences; Interaction; *Media Research; *Models; Organizational Theories; Research Methodology; Social Development; Social Exchange Theory; Technological Advancement
IDENTIFIERS *Westley MacLean Model

ABSTRACT

A revision of the Westley-MacLean model of 1957 for communication research accommodates an incorporation of some of the research areas that have blossomed during the last three decades. The revision concentrates on two aspects of the original: (1) organizational features within the advocate, communicator and audience roles; and (2) environmental factors that influence these roles. The organizational features deal primarily with interaction among individuals and groups in organizations. The environmental factors include the economic, regulatory, social, cultural and technological developments, as well as interaction among individuals who represent the various communicator and audience roles. The extended model incorporates the interaction of people within the subsystems and includes the interaction of individuals in various roles across the subsystems. The extended model specifies environmental factors that affect news and the objects of orientations and includes the possibility that messages need not be entirely mediated. Some can be experienced directly. By including the developments, the model may contribute further to the purpose of the original to order existing mass communications research, to point to strengths and weaknesses in our knowledge, and to stimulate further effort. (Two figures are included and 21 notes are attached.) (MG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED312681

The Westley-MacLean Model Revisited: An Extension of a Conceptual Model for Communication Research

by

Stephen Lacy
School of Journalism
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824
517-355-2489

A paper presented to the Theory and Methodology Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, D. C., August 1989.

CS 506796

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Stephen Lacy

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

In 1957, Westley and MacLean published their revised conceptual model for communication research.[1] The purpose of the model was to order existing research and to suggest new avenues for future research. The model is a successful heuristic device. It is an abstract representation of the mediated communication process. The purpose of this paper is to revise the Westley-MacLean model to incorporate some of the research areas that have blossomed during the three decades since it was published. It is hoped that the extended model will serve the same purposes as the original.

The revision concentrates on two aspects of the original: (1) organizational features within the advocate, communicator and audience roles; (2) environmental factors that influence these roles. The organizational features deal primarily with interaction among individuals and groups in organizations. The environmental factors include the economic, regulatory, social, cultural and technological developments, as well as interaction among individuals who represent the various communicator and audience roles.

The Original Model

The Westley-MacLean model is presented in Figure 1.[2] In this model the X's are objects of orientation (events, objects and people) that fall within the sensory fields of A, which represent communicators who play advocacy roles, and C, which represent communicators who play channel roles. A is a person, or system, who observes X's and then transmits purposeful messages about these observations through media. C serves as agent for B, people or groups who seek information. As an agent, the role of

C is to select and pass on information that B needs and wants.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

The messages about the X's are represented by the heavy arrows X' and X''. The dashed arrows represent feedback from B to A and C and from C to A. While the role of C often involves the use of messages from A, the model also shows that C can observe objects and events in the environment and report them to B. The model also emphasizes that an X can be observed with more than one sense (the second sense is represented by X_{3m}).

This model is quite useful in explaining the mass communication process. Journalists (C) may see an event and report on their experiences through newspapers, television, magazines or any other media. The journalists also receive reports from individuals and groups (A) in forms such as press releases, which can be used without changes or changed through reporter follow-up interviews and observations. These stories are used by B, who may provide feedback in various forms to A and C. The feedback is important because A's message was purposeful, and feedback suggests whether or not the purpose was met. As an agent for B, C must have the feedback to decide if B is being served adequately.

While this model is of heuristic value, it does not represent some of the processes that affect the content B receives. These processes fall into the following categories: interpersonal and mediated interaction within groups, interaction of individuals representing different groups, environmental processes, and personal experiences of audience members.

The first category, interpersonal and mediated interaction

within groups, represents what happens inside organizations (e.g. advertisers and political groups) that try to influence the public and within organizations that assemble and distribute information (e.g. newspapers and television news departments). These internal relations affect the formal and informal communication that flows from the group.

Second, interaction of individuals representing different groups involves the direct contact between a person representing one type of organization (e.g. government agency) and another representing a different type of organization (e.g. television news department). This direct interaction can affect the eventual content because of a mutually dependent relationship between source and reporter.

Environmental processes compose the third category. These are events and trends within the environment that affect the information process but are beyond the control of a single person or organization. These include, but are not necessarily limited to, economic markets, government regulation, technological development, and the cultural and social system in which communication takes place.

The final category is personal experience of audience members. While much of the mediated information received by B has no reference in experience, some of it does. The experience may be first-hand or through interpersonal communication, but it can and does affect the impact of mediated information on B. For example, a person may read about the growing inflation rate but not pay much attention to the information until that person sees an increase in the weekly grocery bill.[3]

Research into the processes that affect media content has grown greatly since the original model was published. The emphasis of this research is on formation as well as the effects of messages. It is assumed here that as the message varies so will the effect. For example, several studies have looked at the impact of media competition and ownership on news content.[4] Others have examined the impact of regulation[5] and technology on content.[6] The role of culture and ideology in communication has long been a concern of scholars and has gained recent attention as well.[7] The examination of behavior within a news organization dates to Breed's ground-breaking work[8] and has been pursued by sociologists[9] as well as communication scholars.[10] The study of individuals' experiences and interpersonal interactions with communication systems dates at least to the work of Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Katz[11] and concerns the interaction of A, C and B in setting agendas for public discussion.

While these types of research are implicit in the model, its use of the symbols A, B and C as either individuals or groups hides the four types of relationships mentioned above. Westley and MacLean based their model on the interpersonal communication model of Newcomb,[12] but their model does not apply just to interpersonal communication. They wrote:

> For Newcomb, A and B can only be persons. While we have tended to imply persons in these roles, it should now be made clear that we do not intend to confine the model to the level of individual personality. The role for B, for instance, may be that of a person, or a primary group, or a total social system.[13]

While this makes the model more general, it fails to include the possible interaction among these different individuals who communicate within the confines of a social system or group. The original model can represent the interaction of people with people, the interaction of people with organizations of which they are not members, and the interaction of organizations with organizations. It doesn't represent the interaction within an organization and its impact on message content.

The model also assumes undifferentiated roles within the news organizations. It does not really differentiate among reporters, editors and upper-level management within C. Research since the first model has found that different types of people within C organizations have different perceptions of their roles and different beliefs about their jobs.[14]

Although the model includes interaction among actors in the form of feedback, this type of relationship is a reaction to content, rather than a direct experience between individuals representing the various roles of the model. A more direct relationship that influences content has been found between reporters and their sources.[15] Similar types of relationships may exist between journalists and audience members and advocates and audience members.

The expanded model presented here incorporates intra-organizational processes. In doing so, the model becomes more complex but also more useful in classifying recent communication research.

Extended Model

The extended model is shown in Figure 2. It is consistent

with the original Westley-MacLean Model, but it has six additions that provide more detail about the communication process.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

The first three are associated with the A, C and B symbols in the original. These three symbols represent organizations or systems in the extended model. The box for A represents organizations that communicate as advocates. The people within A serve as news sources. While sources need not be members of organizations, many, if not most, story ideas originate from someone associated with an organization.[16] Within the organization shown by A, two different types of people interact. The symbol m represents the managers of the organization, while p stands for other people, say workers or public relations practitioners.

Managers set policy for an organization, but policy can be influenced by the other people in the organization. This interaction will vary in nature and intensity, but organizations often involve political behavior and coalition building.[17] Some X in the environment is observed by a member or members of A. It is interpreted by the members, who are affected by interaction with each other. The interpretation is passed on to a media organization represented by C. A public relations person, manager or just worker may pass on the interpretation. Interpretations of X's vary. So, a member of an organization who speaks to the press need not always advocate the organization's position. This happens with leaks from government agencies that embarrass those in power. However, the tendency is for members

of an organization to support its goals when speaking to media representatives.

Just as with the Westley-MacLean model, X' messages could be from individuals or organizations. However, all individuals are members of groups, which means individual perceptions of reality are affected by group interaction. The degree of impact from this interaction varies, but it is important to recognize the impact of groups on message formation by their members.

A second difference between figures 1 and 2 is the interaction within the C box. This represents the relations within media organizations among three types of members -- reporters (r), editors or news directors (e), and managers (m). This interaction has been the basis for numerous studies ranging from the impact of ownership to examinations of socialization in news rooms. Editors are usually classified as managers, but their ability to form policy varies with the job they hold. Managers in the extended model represent top management, such as publisher, editor and managing editor; all of whom help set organizational policy.

The exact result of the interaction among reporter, editor and manager is a function of many variables. These include: individual characteristics, such as education, socioeconomic background and ethics; the nature of the organization's structure, policy and ownership; and the relationships of C members with the members of A organizations who serve as sources.

Since a publication is rarely completed by one person, mediated communication is generally a group process, and, as such, interaction among individuals is crucial to the process.

Although C represents activities within news organizations, the channel role need not include a news organization. An A organization can buy advertising time or space to advocate its position. In such a case, C is a channel in the technological sense. It becomes an organization that carries advertising. The interaction of reporters and editors no longer plays a role. However, managers can affect advertising content through policy.

The third difference deals with the B symbol. The b's within the B box represent the interaction among audience members. The transmission of information to B does not mean it is accepted without question. In fact, the various b's who receive the message may discuss it and draw conclusions about the original X that run counter to the impressions conveyed by the reporters and editors within C.

This audience interaction represents the difference between the strong effects and moderate effects approaches to media impact.[10] The b's can influence each other's perceptions of mediated messages. This interaction need not be two way. Some audience members may hold positions as opinion leaders.

Audience membership is not exclusive of membership in the other communication roles. A journalist for one news organization is part of the audiences for other newspapers, magazines and broadcast news programs. The arbitrary classification of people into three boxes represents roles rather than individuals. The same person can take on more than one role at various times. This raises the possibility that influences on a person as an audience member may affect that person's performance in one of the other roles.

The fourth change in the original model is the arrow from the X's to the B box. This arrow is missing in the original model. It indicates that members of an audience can experience or observe some of the X's that become news. This certainly would play a role in how they perceive the message X'' and how they interact with other b's. The ability of some of the b's to observe newsworthy events and to interpret for themselves influences the roles of A and C organizations in setting the public agenda. Interpretations of events that can be experienced directly are not as likely to be influenced by media as those events that cannot be easily experienced by b's.[19]

The fifth change is found in the two-way hatched lines connecting the three boxes. These lines represent direct interaction among individuals within the organizations. Line ica represents interaction between advocate communicators and channel communicators. Line ibc represents interaction between channel communicators and audience members. Line iba shows the interaction between advocate communicators and audience members. Direct interaction influences content by affecting the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of the individuals who serve as advocates, communicators or audience members. Thus, a reporter who works closely with sources over a period of time may begin to assimilate the values of those sources.[20] This could alter message content.

The sixth change is the environmental box, which is represented by the dashed line that surrounds everything else in the model. The environment includes the economic, technological, regulatory, cultural and societal factors that affect the entire

communication process. The factors affect members in some or all of the boxes represented by A, C and B. They can also affect the various X's that are observed by the members of those three boxes. The original model acknowledges the role of environment primarily through X's, but it did not specify particular types of environmental factors that influence the message process.

It is also important to note that the reactions and behavior of individuals within the boxes and the organization represented by the A and C boxes can influence the environment. None of the boxes are closed systems.

Reporting economic trends in mass media is an example of how the environment and communication process can influence each other. This mutual influence can be represented by the model in Figure 2. If inflation heats up, the wholesale price index will increase (X3). The Federal Reserve Board, represented by A, observes this and moves to slow down inflation by increasing the prime rate. This is announced to various media outlets (X'). The reporters and editors within the various C organizations pass this news (X'') to the readers and audiences (b's). In passing the information about the increase, the reporters state that an increased prime rate means higher interest rates for mortgages. After discussing the impact of higher mortgage rates among themselves, some b's move either to buy houses now before the rate goes higher or to delay buying houses to see if the rate will fall in the future.

Actions of the b's concerning housing have an impact on the environment by affecting the inflation rate. If enough people withdraw from the housing market, it will tend to drive down

house prices and help slow inflation. If most people rush to buy houses, it will tend to drive house prices up, fueling inflation and forcing another round of prime rate increases. Either way, the results are reported in the media and can influence action once again.

Advantages of the Extended Model

The extended model explicitly includes areas of research that have developed since the original model was published. It does this in three ways:

(1) The extended model incorporates the interaction of people within the subsystems that affect the messages passing through channels to people in the media audiences.

(2) The extended model includes the interaction of individuals in various roles across subsystems.

(3) The extended model specifies environmental factors that affect news and the objects of orientations.

(4) The extended model includes the possibility that messages need not be entirely mediated. Some can be experienced directly.

This extension is not meant as a criticism of the original model, which has accomplished its purpose of explaining many approaches to mass communication research. However, research developments during the past three decades have concentrated on areas that were not examined extensively before the Westley-MacLean model was published. One could argue that these research developments were implicitly included in the original model. However, by explicitly including the developments, the extended model may contribute further to the purpose of the

original to order existing mass communications research, to point to strengths and weaknesses in our knowledge, and to stimulate further effort.[21]

ENDNOTES

1. Bruce H. Westley and Malcolm S. MacLean Jr., "A Conceptual Model for Communication Research," Journalism Quarterly, 34:31-38 (Winter 1957).

2. Ibid. The model presented here is the final figure of four presented in the original article. The other three represented the relationship between B and its sensory surroundings, among A, B and the surroundings, and among C, B and the surroundings.

3. See Maxwell E. McCombs, "The Agenda-Setting Approach" in Handbook of Political Communication, Dan D. Nimmo and Keith R. Sanders, eds. (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1981), pp. 121-140.

4. Some recent examples of ownership studies include C. N. Olien, P. J. Tichenor and G. A. Donohue, "Relation Between Corporate Ownership and Editor Attitudes About Business," Journalism Quarterly, 65:259-266 (Summer 1988); George A. Donohue, Clarice N. Olien and Phillip J. Tichenor, "Reporting Conflict by Pluralism, Newspaper Type and Ownership," Journalism Quarterly, 62:489-499 (Autumn 1985); and Kenneth Rystrom, "The Effect of Ownership on Newspaper Endorsements," Paper presented to the Association for Education In journalism and Mass Communication, Norman, Oklahoma, August 1986. Examples of competition studies include Guido H. Stempel III, "Effects on Performance of a Cross-Media Monopoly," Journalism Monographs, No. 29, June 1973; Barry R. Litman and Janet Bridges, "An Economic Analysis of Daily Newspaper Performance," Newspaper Research Journal, Spring 1986, pp. 9-26; Stephen Lacy, "Effects

of Intracity Competition on Daily Newspaper Content," Journalism Quarterly, 64:281-290 (Summer-Autumn 1987); and Maxwell McCombs, "Effect of Monopoly in Cleveland on Diversity of Newspaper Content," Journalism Quarterly, 64:740-744, 792 (Winter 1987).

5. Some examples are William C. Adams, "Local Television News Coverage and the Central City," Journal of Broadcasting, 24:253-265 (Spring 1980); Tony Atwater, "Factors of Programme Choice in Public Television: A National Survey," Journal of Educational Television, 12:105-117 (1986); Stephen Lacy, "Content of Joint Operating Newspapers," from Press Concentration and Monopoly, Robert G. Picard, James P. Winter, Maxwell E. McCombs and Stephen Lacy, eds. (Norwood, New Jersey, Ablex Publishing, 1988), pp. 147-160; and Ronald Hicks and James S. Featherston, "Duplication of Newspaper Content in Contrasting Ownership Situations," Journalism Quarterly, 55:549-553 (Autumn 1978).

6. For examples, see Conrad Smith, "Newsgathering Technology and the Content of Local Television News," Journal of Broadcasting, 28:99-101 (Winter 1984); and David R. Bowers, "The Impact of Centralized Printing on the Community Press," Journalism Quarterly, 46:43-46, 52 (Spring 1969).

7. See J. Herbert Altschull, Agents of Power (New York: Longman, 1984); and Daniel J. Czitrom, Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

8. Warren Breed, "Social Control in the News Room: A Functional Analysis," Social Forces, 33:326-335 (May 1955).

9. For examples, see Gaye Tuchman, Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality (New York: The Free Press, 1978);

Mark Fishman, Manufacturing the News (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1980); Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester, "News as Purposive Behavior: On the Strategic Use of Routine Events, Accidents and Scandals," American Sociological Review, 39:101-112 (February 1974).

10. See David M. White, "The Gate Keeper: A Case Study in the Selection of News," Journalism Quarterly, 27:383-390 (Fall 1950); Paul Snider, "Mr. Gates Revisited: A 1966 Version of the 1949 Case Study," Journalism Quarterly, 44:419-427 (Autumn 1967); John Dimmick, "The Gate-Keeper: An Uncertainty Theory, Journalism Monographs, No. 37, November 1974; Dan G. Drew, "Roles and Decision Making of Three Television Beat Reporters," Journal of Broadcasting, 16:165-173 (Spring 1972); and Robert P. Judd, "The Newspaper Reporter in a Suburban City," Journalism Quarterly, 38:35-42 (Winter 1961).

11. B. R. Berelson, P. F. Lazarsfeld and W. N. McPhee, Voting: A Study of Opinion Formulation in a Presidential Campaign (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954); and Elihu Katz, "The Two-Step Flow of Communication: An Up-to-Date Report of a Hypothesis," Public Opinion Quarterly, 21:61-78 (Spring 1957). Interpersonal communication is also an important aspect of diffusion of information. See E. Rogers and F. Shoemaker, Communication of Innovations. (New York: Free Press, 1971).

12. Theodore M. Newcomb, "An Approach to the Study of Communicative Acts," Psychological Review, 60:393-404 (November 1953).

13. Westley and MacLean, op. cit., p. 34.

14. David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, The American

Journalist: A Portrait of U.S. News People and Their Work. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1986). Weaver and Wilhoit found that being a reporter or editor made a difference in predicting the professional values a journalist would have. Similar results were found with broadcast journalists by Myria Watkins Allen, Joy Hart Seibert, John W. Haas and Stephanie Zimmermann, "Broadcasting Departmental Impact on Employee Perceptions and Conflict," Journalism Quarterly, 65:668-677 (Fall 1988).

15. Direct interaction affects the communication process through the routinization of reporter-source relationships, but interaction can have other effects. The dependency based on structure is not the same as interpersonal dependency, although results may be similar. A reporter can routinely dependent upon a source and not assimilate that sources values. See for example Leon V. Sigal, Reporters and Officials (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Co., 1973).

16. Stephen Lacy and David Matustik, "Dependence on Organization and Beat Sources for Story Ideas: A case Study of Four Newspapers," Newspaper Research Journal, Winter 1983, pp. 9-16.

17. For examples see Richard M. Cyert and James G. March, A Behavioral Theory of the Firm. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963); Rosabeth Moss Kanter, The Change Masters. (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1983); and Chris Argyris, Behind the Front Page (San Francisco: Josey-Bass Publishers, 1974).

18. Earlier studies of persuasion and propaganda emphasized

the powerful impact mass communication can have on people. For example, see Alfred M. Lee and Elizabeth B. Lee, eds. The Fine Art of Propaganda: A Study of Father Coughlin's Speeches. (Orlando Fla: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovitch, 1939). Later studies emphasized that mass media did not have the direct and powerful effects attributed to them by early researchers. See Joseph Klapper, The Effects of Mass Communication. (New York: Free Press, 1960). A good discussion of the powerful versus limited effects approaches can be found in Werner J. Severin with James W. Tankard, Jr., Communication Theories: Origins, Methods, Uses, 2nd. ed. (New York: Longman, 1988).

19. This relative impact of direct and mediated experience is discussed as part of dependency theory. See Melvin L. DeFleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach, Theories of Mass Communication, 5th ed. (New York: Longman, 1989), pp. 297-327.

20. Walter Gieber and Walter Johnson examined the process of values assimilation in beat reporters in "The City Hall `Beat': A Study of Reporter and Source Roles," Journalism Quarterly, 38:289-297 (Summer 1961).

21. Westley and MacLean, op. cit., p. 38.

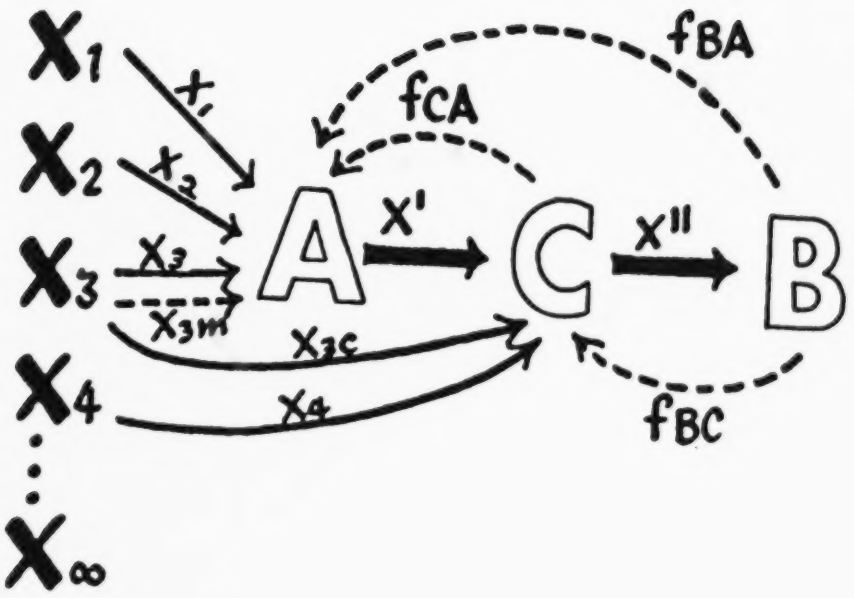

FIGURE 1

The messages C transmits to B (X") represent his selections from both messages to him from A's (X') and C's selections and abstractions from Xs in his own sensory field (X_{3c}, X_4), which may or may not be Xs in A's field. Feedback not only moves from B to A (f_{BA}) and from B to C (f_{BC}) but also from C to A (f_{CA}). Clearly, in the mass communication situation, a large number of Cs receive from a very large number of As and transmit to a vastly larger number of Bs, who simultaneously receive from other Cs.

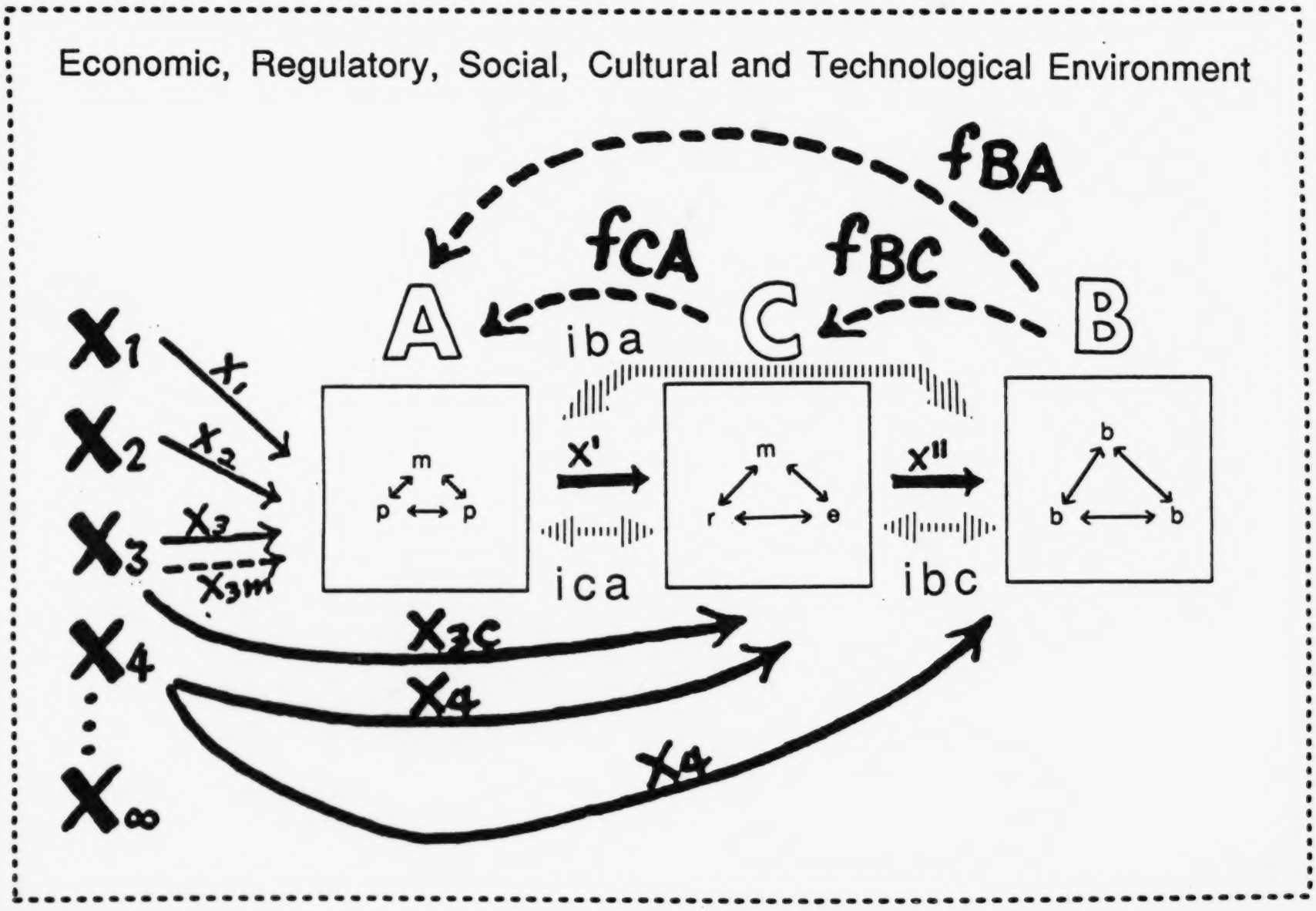
Economic, Regulatory, Social, Cultural and Technological Environment
fBA
fCA
fBC
A
C
B
iba
X1
X2
X3
X3m
X'
X''
m
p
p
m
r
e
b
b
b
ica
ibc
X3c
X4
X∞

FIGURE 2

The messages (X") organization C transmits to the the public (B) result from messages (X') to members of C from A's, from reporters' and editors' selections and abstractions of X's in their own sensory field (X_{3c}, X_4), from the interaction among the reporters (r), editors (e) and managers (m) of the C organization, and from the interaction among members of C, A and B (ica and ibc). The messages (X') from A are a result of X's from the sensory fields of the people (p) and managers (m) within an A organization, from the interaction of these two types of people, and from the interaction among members of C, A and B (ica and iba). The perception of members of the public (b's) about the message X" can be affected not only by the message but by individual experiences with the sensory field (X_{4B}), by interaction among the members of the public, and by interaction among members of C, B and A (iba and ibc). Feedback moves from B to A (f_{BA}), from B to C (f_{BC}), and from C to A (f_{CA}). Clearly, in mass communication, a large number of C's receive from a large number of A's and transmit to a vastly larger number of b's, who simultaneously receive from other C's. All of these processes are affected by economic, regulatory, social, cultural and technological factors in the environment.